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FREEDOM'S TRIUMPH---SPION-KOP.

BY

John F. Sleeper

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Of fleeting life its lustre and perfume."
Cowper.

The Sherwood Press.
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John F. Sheafer
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Prefatory Remarks.

It is very unlikely that Chamberlain-governed England will learn any lasting lesson from the disastrous failure of Buller's second attempt to cross the now historic Tugela in furtherance of the never sufficiently to be abhorred design of a clique of some of the most unscrupulous, ambitious, and heartless scoundrels that have ever been permitted to introduce fresh misery into an afflicted world by their selfish machinations—the design to seize by force of arms those alluring possessions of a much coerced people that more than a century of the most flagrant injustice and wanton barbarity ever shown by man toward his weaker fellow, has repeatedly placed in serious jeopardy.

So far, the frightful loss of life at Spion Kop has not abated England's infamous campaign. Who will ultimately succeed in winning the titanic contest now but just beginning?

The Boers, beyond doubt, if internal dissensions and selfish considerations do not ultimately render them A DISUNITED PEOPLE.

Spion Kop

I.

PRELUDE.

The bolts of heav'n Yon hills have riv'n
In Afric's forceful storms,
Dwarf by contrast With War's fell blast
That Nature's face deforms.

Quathlamba's rugged ranges heave their massive boulders high
Like heaven-assailing Typhons—threatening the starless sky;
Enarmored in mist-mantle those stern stone giants stand,
While deafening drums of thunder roll reveilles o'er the land
As hast'ning cloud-hosts marshall, dark on Nature's airy plain,
To speed on wild-wind coursers in the volleying of rain,
Where the Storm King weirdly battling in the black death of night,
Downhurls from krantz to ravine quiv'ring javelins of light.
But louder than the thunder of an elemental war
Shall echo 'mid yon mountains the cannon's awesome roar—
More deathly than its lightnings shall flash the meteor shell
When Man's phrenetic passions unto demon-fury swell
The bosch-kop's dwarf mimosas—dense, hardy, thick-set trees—
Sha'l bend before a metal blast as ne'er before the breeze;
The gay green saucy sun-bird flee from its sylvan bower,
As elfin shrieks the lyddite shell and beats the shrapnel-shower;
For rains of lead and iron shall wide spread woe eftsoon,
Ere Afric's sultry summer sun hath marked the next day's noon.
For immensurate Ambition mounts its Juggernautal car,
And crushes votive thousands on the purple path of War!

2.

Both storm and mist, Essays assist
Of Buller's cherished myth:
That Spion gain'd Then he's obtain'd
The key to Ladysmith!

Deep-entrenched on Tabanyama—poised high o'er Zwartkop's bushy crests;
Like keen, watchful, Lammergeyers, guarding their imperilled nests,
High-eyried far, where Tugela, dwarf-tree-margined, sinuous roams,
All their vague wings wide-outreaching, one just touching Acton Holmes,
Past Colenso's rapid cascade, which, dark with arenaceous loam,
Churn'd the best blood of Hart's Brigade to empurpl'd grewsome foam;
The few Farmer-bands of Botha, alert and armed against attack,
Foiled Buller's front of conquest; held England's forty thousand back;
(Though merely seven thousand mann'd Natalia's citadels of stone),
From where low-lying Ladysmith's beleagured fires dimly shone,
And White's faint thirteen thousand fought sickness, famine, and the foe
On the heliographic promise with which Mt. Alice's bright eyes glow.

* * * * * * * * *

Now shifts the mist-cloud curtain, and mild Selene's spectral lune
Soft illumines veldt and kopje; and clear, in stern sonorous tune
Floats on, solemn, through yon mid-air, the deep-toned pious burgher-hymns
With a wondrous depth of feeling borne o'er the ghostly mountain-rims.
The British camps outpour a host of daring Scotch and Fusileers;
Like the marching ants of Huber each toiling pigmy line appears,
As, far view'd, the clay-hued bodies, issuing from the parent nest,
Stream in rythmic order onward, bent on enslaving battle-quest;

Winding myriâd-footed upward—rude simulating in the gloom
Huge Scolopendras, vague-outlined, on those steep, sombre, hills of doom:
Three days these foredoomed columns had writhed on from ridge to ridge,
Seeking, with successful purpose, the rugged distance to abridge
Interposed to bald-topped Spion—frowning goal of veiled attack—
And, as they progressed forward, slow each thin Boer line drew back;
So withdraws the Natal python, retractile in his rising wrath;
Till, wrought at last to brooded effort, his coils surround those in his path.
Now over the open glacis and on, on, up the mountain-slope—
With rain and a fitful darkness enshrouding the men as they grope—
Climbs the Indian file of the English, to dart on their foemen sleeping;
And away! like startled Springboks, goes the Vryheid picket, leaping,
As, touch'd by the lash of terror, adown they flee in panic fear
While, through the yielding walls of mist, bursts rousing bayonet and cheer
Lo! the infantry of England have won the grassy western side,
And half-o'er a new Majuba swift flows their khaki-yellow tide;
The victor-shout is sounding far—cheerily up from Spion West—
The Briton's grasped "The master key" and trifling trouble seems the rest!

3.

The flag that now
On Spion's brow
O'erwaves its haughty sheen,
Shall droop ere Night
Dethrones Day's light
In red defeat, I ween!

A space they unmolested hold, the captur'd ravine-rifted kop,
And lie 'mid the long wiry grass and boulders of its storm-worn top—
Then Death his fateful trumpet blew, and Ruin concentrating hurl'd
Consuming genie breath upon these sateless plund'rers of the world.
"Retake the hill!" rings Botha's voice—instant each kindling fiery word
Fans patriot zeal to quenchless flame—with racial ire, newly stirred,
The Vryheid men covet the van, to dash the night's disgrace away,
And close behind their eager band press grimly forward in brave array
From Heidelberg and Caroline, the stanchest true-hearts of the Boer,
As blithe to seek the waiting foe as to love-tryst lies a wooer.

Their steeds the bits are champing fast, in the foot-hills screening shade,
While o'er the low'ring spurs they climb; falling and rising undismay'd,
Pressing on, or, summoned by Death, lying all limp and still among
The bruising boulders scatter'd wide while Maxim and Metford eerie sung.
Dim burns many a life-lamp, ere, yields the first trench to that onrush
Through the ceaseless missile storm of metals that rend and crush!
Distant Mount Alice's mighty guns with useless efforts fume and warm
But Boers leap, up Spion's steep, to the cry of "Storm! burghers, storm!"
While belches flame each fortress hill; from all the beaded kops, that rise
'Round Spion's crown, wild-fire of death from Nordenfeldt and Cruesot flies
Affrighting surges shot and shell—Destruction ploughs the quaking land;
As Britain's warriors charge up slopes two arm'd heights loftily command;
Till worn, confused, and broken down—reeds smitten by a hurricane—
By the shrill-piping Mauser breath, they fly the goals they sought to gain,
These wearied, half-crazed Lancashires—lowly they creep and writhe away
Till again their helpless remnant in the grim shambles crouch at bay;
For each drear, toil-deepened, furrow sunk on ungracious Spion's brow
With the life-tide of the bravest brims nigh a purple runlet now!
The livelong day enforcing men upclamber, reckless, to their graves
Where, fire-scath'd—projectile-shred—defiant England's flag yet waves;
Scots-Greys—Kings-Rifles scramble up (with numbers the red stream swells)
Food for fresh powder, ghastily torn, in that horrid death-zone of shells.

4.

The cunning lure, Left by the Boer,
The English long will rue:
They heap each trench As did the French
The field of Waterloo!

'Tis afternoon, and flut'tring white proclaims from a near west trench,
Lancashire's courage wanes at last—well might stoic Indians blench!
Crouch'd, availless against a foe, in the blood-brook of that rock-cleft;
Comrades bodies up-piled about; thunderbolt stricken, riv'n and reft;
The bursting shells dim ghostly green, lighting each tense face eerily
As gory rise the khakied groups, powder-wreath'd, swaying wearily;

Forth they step, as out of a tomb; Weapons downcast, or raised aloft
To the Boer van whose fire ceased. Thundered a villain, Thorneycroft
English leader since Woodgate's fall, "To hell with surrender, men;"
Then roared above the battle-din: "Fire!" And foulest of traitors then
Of all that British birth have known, a volley meets the victor foe,
Blighting the blossoms of good intent,—laying a few brave martyrs low.
But the Boers now fire, aiming well, and 'neath a cyclone-blast of ball
Lancashire piles the rubied rocks with bodies and arms as they fall!
Day long, till dusk from flowing red banished the sickening hue away,
Bullet and shell searched quick and dead, as together they jumbled lay;
The splinter'd rock in fragments flew and danced in the steely hail
And ruddy dust, like Lismore's snow, o'erdrifted from the powder-gale
On twisted limbs and hideous heads and formless flesh—appalling sight!
And corses twined in ghastly knots as though fierce fratricidal fight
Had raged upon the reeking rocks and ev'ry nobler attribute
That o'er the brute-tribe lifts mankind, fled e'en the form in war's dispute
Then Discipline forsook the ranks—pale Terror ruled augmenting rout,
Till but from Enmyama's shade some English anxiously peer'd out
When Night's relieffful death-pall fell on that affrighting mountain scene,
And the worn British remnant hied unto the white tents of the queen,
Their twice defeated chief to tell, the drear and most unwelcome tale
Of a Majuba yet more grim, to turn all blatant England pale.
And Louis Botha slowly rode up Spion's sloping further side,
Alternate passions rife within, while sped that silent starlight ride,
And sad survey'd the bloodiest field mayhap senescent Time hath seen
Since Wellington, at Waterloo, wept o'er a corpse-heaped battle-green;
Yet throbb'd his veins with righteous joy, for thy stark mountain's fissued top
Poured forth that hireling blood to Death, for Freedom's Triumph—

Spion Kop!

Valediction.

To ye! consistent, gallant, few,
Who rear the standard of the Free
On rugged Natal's lofty hills
In holy zeal for Liberty;
Fronting the freeborn, honest, breast
To the red bayonets of slaves;
To ye, all patriots look today!
What though your meed be nameless graves?
Who falls in Freedom's sacred strife,
Beating dark-brow'd Oppression down,
Him shall Tradition cherish long—
Him shall the martyr's radiant crown
Exalt and glorify o'er kings
And whilom conquerors of Earth;
Though uninform'd his noble mind—
Base and obscur'd his humble birth!
For such I pen the praiseful strain,
And raise the stirring battle-song;
Oh! may in every Freeman's heart
Its chord, responsive, echo long!

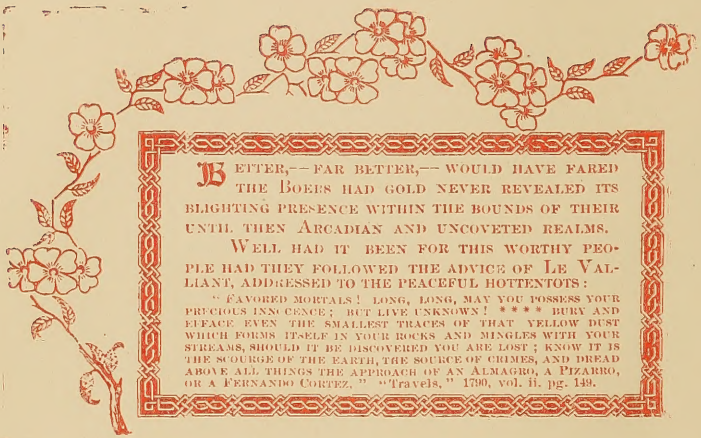
THE END.

Partial Progress?

[illegible] permanently [illegible] is undoubtedly fraught with much future benefit to mankind.

But when we reflect that there [illegible] may open to ensure the resort of a pow[illegible] cable arbitration; save by an [illegible] improbable war waged or threatened by a confederation of weaker countries the fact is forced upon us, that:

[illegible]



BETTER,—FAR BETTER,—WOULD HAVE FARED THE BOERS HAD GOLD NEVER REVEALED ITS BLIGHTING PRESENCE WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF THEIR UNTIL THEN ARCADIAN AND UNCOVETED REALMS.

WELL HAD IT BEEN FOR THIS WORTHY PEOPLE HAD THEY FOLLOWED THE ADVICE OF LE VALLIANT, ADDRESSED TO THE PEACEFUL HOTTENTOTS:

"FAVORED MORTALS! LONG, LONG, MAY YOU POSSESS YOUR PRECIOUS INNOCENCE; BUT LIVE UNKNOWN! * * * * BURY AND EFFACE EVEN THE SMALLEST TRACES OF THAT YELLOW DUST WHICH FORMS ITSELF IN YOUR ROCKS AND MINGLES WITH YOUR STREAMS, SHOULD IT BE DISCOVERED YOU ARE LOST; KNOW IT IS THE SCOURGE OF THE EARTH, THE SOURCE OF CRIMES, AND DREAD ABOVE ALL THINGS THE APPROACH OF AN ALMAGRO, A PIZARRO, OR A FERNANDO CORTEZ." "Travels," 1790, vol. ii. pg. 149.

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